

# Malay Medium Students at MIT: An experiment

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The Mara Institute of Technology a school of pre-university studies, and the first higher educational institution to open its door to pupils from the Malay medium schools, admitted 340 students into the Institute in January, 1970. As the normal Institute year begins in July, it was planned to put these Malay medium students through an intensive English course lasting six months at the Institute, before the academic year began.

Heads of Malay medium schools were requested to submit the names of the ten best students in their respective schools. These students were interviewed by a Selection Board composed of MIT lecturers. The Board selected the best, two from each school. A total of 340 students gained admission into the Institute.

They arrived on 22nd January, 1970 and were put through a preliminary English Test, which was designed to test their knowledge of basic English structures. They were then streamed into twelve classes according to language ability. It was the aim of the Institute to prepare these students for admission into the following schools: Applied Science, Engineering, Architecture, Rubber Technology, Accountancy, and Business and Public Administration. English is the medium of instruction in all these schools.

A staff of fifteen graduate teachers was assigned to these classes. Of this number, only six were trained and experienced teachers of language. The others were graduates in literature. The first month of the six-month course was devoted entirely to the teaching of English. The students had five hours of English a day.

In the succeeding months, Mathematics, Book-keeping, Commerce, and Science subjects were introduced, with the particular purpose of familiarising the students with the use of new vocabulary related to these new subjects.

Language work in the English class was confined to the revision and re-teaching of the syllabus prescribed

for Malay medium schools. No texts were prescribed, but teachers were at liberty to choose their own texts and this was felt to be useful. A variety of supplementary readers was made available for students' reading. The students were subject to monthly test-oral, aural and written – for the consolidation of the work done in each month. Language tapes were used for oral/aural training.

Of the 340 students admitted in January, 1970 only 222 remained after the M.C.E. results were announced. Those who failed the M.C.E. were asked to leave. Those who obtained Grades I and II left of their own accord to join the Malay medium Form Six classes. Of the 222 who remained, 155 passed the Institute examination in June, 1970. Twenty-eight failed and thirty-nine students were retained for a further period of six months. An overall 54% pass was obtained in the English Paper.

This was the first ever experiment conducted at MARA with Malay medium students and very useful lessons were learnt by the Institute. It was obvious that the standard of English displayed by Malay medium pupil was very poor and the range of attainment varied greatly from one school to another. There was no uniform standard. The need to raise their standards in the three subjects – English, Mathematics, Science – was very evident.

It was felt essential to have a full-year intensive course in English, before Malay medium students could be streamed into the professional courses taught at the Institute. Specially trained and experienced teachers needed to be recruited to handle these classes. Courses in remedial English needed to be given top priority. The use of a properly-equipped Language laboratory such as the Institute now has is extremely important.

Whatever the difficulties experienced, the keenness of the Malay medium students to master English was a major compensatory factor. The writer has never met a keener set of students.